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Green Thumbs, Full Hearts



Office of University Communications

April 29, 2011

Gardner-Webb Students Launch Community Garden

Gardner-Webb University students have begun an ambitious journey toward environmental sustainability and stewardship, community involvement, and service for humanity. The vehicle by which those destinations will be reached is the brand new Community Garden project.

The garden project is in full bloom this spring, but the seeds were planted last semester when Stephanie Richey, Gardner-Webb's community outreach coordinator, led a student service trip to an organic farm outside Asheville, N.C. Brittany Mote, a junior Health and Wellness major, was a member of that team, and the trip affected her profoundly. "In the Health and Wellness program, I had already begun to learn about nutrition and organic food. But when I began to see how important sustainable farming practices are, and when I thought about how much food we have and how many people in our own communities go without, I just discovered a passion for organic farming and fighting hunger," Mote said.

While working at the farm in Asheville, Richey and Mote came up with the idea for a community garden at Gardner-Webb. The idea had already crossed the mind of Dr. Jeffrey Hartman, associate professor of Physical Education, Wellness, and Sports Studies at Gardner-Webb University, who Mote calls "the catalyst" needed to launch the idea. "He (Dr. Hartman) approached Stephanie and suggested we start a garden, and that was what Stephanie and I really needed to get the ball rolling."

That growth has come quickly, fostered by strong University support. The University offered a plot of land on Memorial Drive for the garden, and the team has been approved for a water source on-site. The Student Government Association has allocated funds for an equipment building. Most importantly, students have been volunteering to assist the project. But probably the biggest factor in the garden's early success is its purpose.

Richey and Mote plan to donate the garden's produce to the Children's Homes of Cleveland County. "The James and Aaron's homes purchase the majority of their food from the Metrolina Food Bank in Gaston County, N.C.," Richey explained. "The Bank serves 28 agencies in Cleveland County, and they have seen an increase of 35-45% in emergency assistance for food. If our garden can become the primary food source for the Children's Homes of Cleveland County, then the Metrolina Food Bank could extend its service even further in our region." "Plus," added Mote, "much of the Food Bank's stores are canned, but fresh food has greater nutritional value. We really want the children to be healthier, so that's part of our goal as well."

Because of her hard work in helping realize this vision, Mote was recently honored with the first annual Community Garden Leader Award at GWU's Leadership, Service, and Volunteerism Awards ceremony. She has also been approved to remain in Boiling Springs to work on the garden this summer, time she plans to use to expand the garden even further. But it's not only vegetables that she hopes to cultivate, but community relationships as well.

"We're calling this a community garden," she said, "because we really want it to be a part of the community and not just a part of Gardner-Webb's campus. We'd love for the children at the Homes to come see where their food is grown. We want kids from Cleveland County Schools to come and learn more about organic and sustainable growing. We want our students and members of the community to know the joy of working together to achieve an awesome purpose."

For those interested in supporting or getting involved with the Community Garden, contact Stephanie Richey at (704) 406-2135, or by email at srichey@gardner-webb.edu.

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Written by public relations intern Matt Leonard